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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.

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Statement

As part of the Alliance of Youth CEOs, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the World Organisation of the Scout Movement in consultative status with ECOSOC view the education of girls and young women as a fundamental human right.

• We believe education is a basic human right and fundamental to the fight for human dignity and freedom. For 125 million children and 880 million adults, that right is violated everyday.

• 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child', ratified by 192 countries, obliges governments to "make primary education compulsory and available free to all." Yet, of the 680 million children of primary school age, 115 million are not in school – almost two thirds of these being girls (57%).

• Economic hardship can mean many parents view survival as the main priority and often co-opt their children, especially girls, as additional labour resources or keep them at home to help with household chores and care. In the South, some 200 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 go to work instead of going to school.

• Cultural and patriarchal family structures tend to prioritise the needs of boys over girls. Other obstacles to girls' education include a shortage of school space, lack of female teachers, long distances to travel, shortage of text books and school supplies, unaffordable fees and violence.

• The earning potential of women is often lower than men as fewer women study subjects that lead to economic success. Education equips girls and women with the ability to acquire and process information and increased earning power. Every year of schooling lost represents a 10 to 20 per cent reduction in girls' future incomes.

• In 2005 the world missed the first Millennium Development Goal: to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Despite some improvement in girls' enrolment over the past decade, the rate at which the gender gap is closing will need to be accelerated if the targets are to be met by 2015.

• Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All, regards implementing education programmes to combat the HIV/AIDS as a matter of urgency. According to the WHO, lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, lack of education and life skills puts young people at great risk. Formal, academic education continues to be seen as the only essential part of education. Thus, non-formal education which is well equipped to provide girls with the life skills and decision-making capacity to fight discrimination where they can, is underestimated and its benefits are not fully realized.

We call on the international community to

• **Support** free, quality basic education by 2015 and reverse the unacceptably slow progress on girls' education

• **Support** organizations involved in promoting the formal and non-formal education of girls and young women

• **Increase** political commitment to give women's and girls' education a higher priority

• **Introduce** poverty-reduction strategies to ensure that the right to education is the right of every child

• **Eliminate** gender discrimination and promote educational programmes that challenge traditional attitudes of men and boys toward women and girls

• **Provide** universal access to basic social and education services

• **Recognize** that non-formal education is an essential part of the educational process

• **Recognize** the contribution that can be made by non-formal education organizations; specifically by seeking dialogue with non-formal education organizations; supporting and utilizing the skills and experience of such organizations; and strengthening the partnership between formal and nonformal education to create policies that meet the needs of girls.